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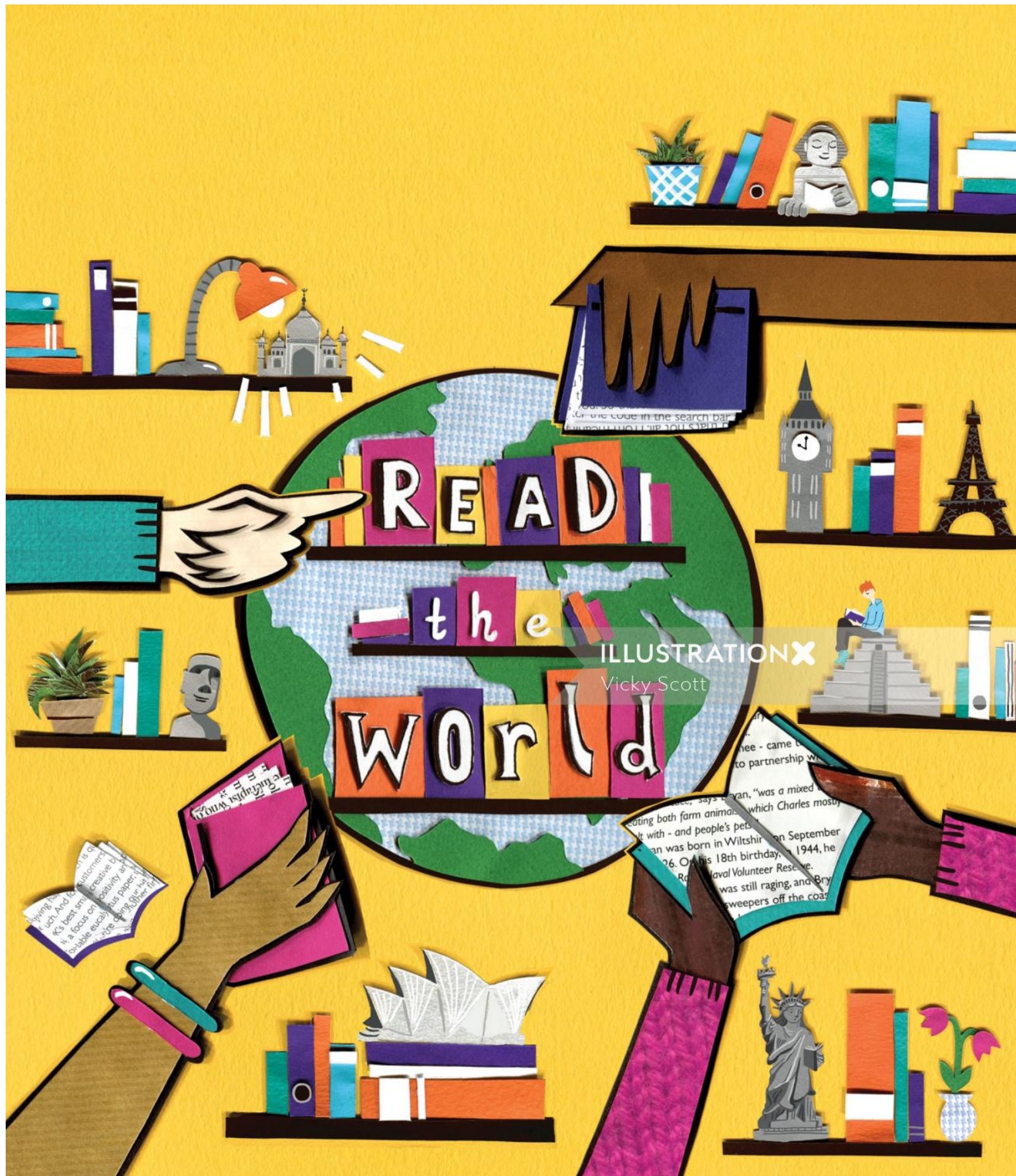
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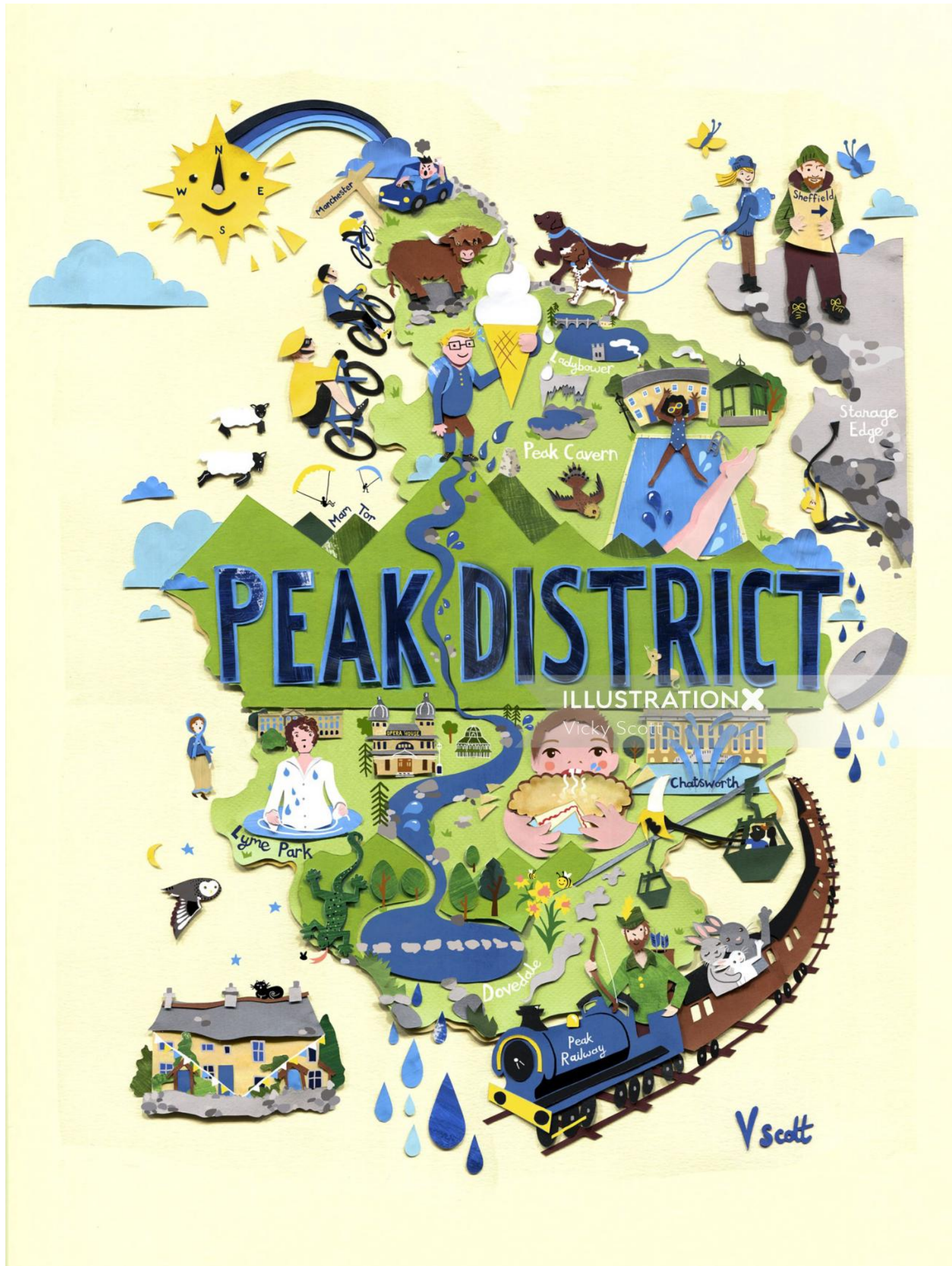
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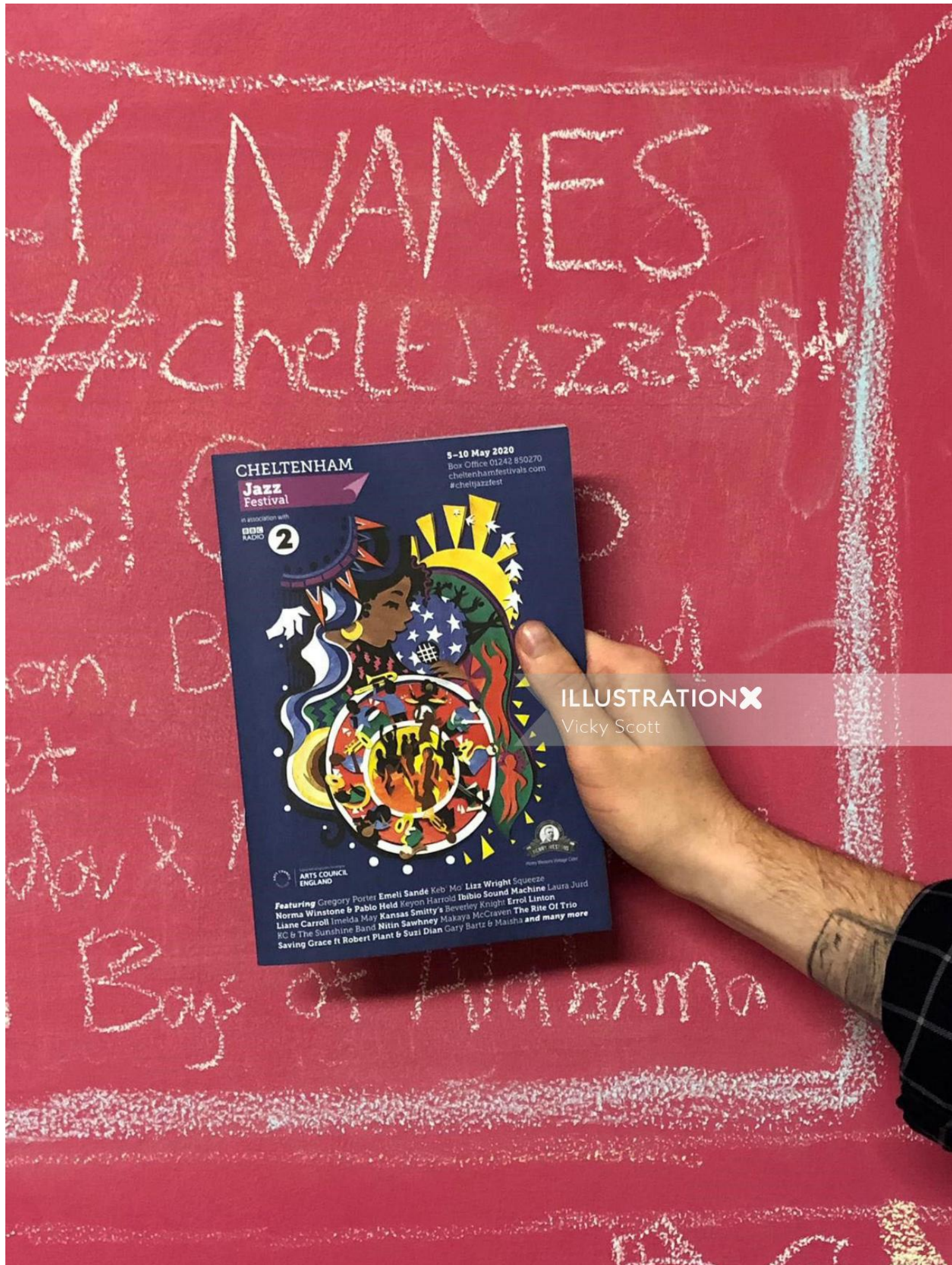


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Story: Peter Kettlewell Illustration: Vicky Scott

One day, Dawn's teacher asked if she wanted to join the school choir. Dawn's face blushed red, and she shook her head. The thought of singing in front of anybody made her go hot and cold all over. Dawn liked to sing, but only when she was by herself.

Every day, as she was getting ready for school, she heard a robin singing in the garden. She went down to

breakfast, humming cheerfully. "That's a nice tune," said her Dad. "The robin sang it," said Dawn. "He likes to sing by himself, too." "But he's in the biggest choir of all!" said Dad. Dawn looked at him. "But he's just sitting in the garden by himself." The next morning her dad woke her up very early. "Time to get up," he said.

"We're going outside." Half asleep, she got dressed and put on her wellies. It was still dark out. "Where are we going?" she said, with a big yawn. "It's a surprise," said Dad winking. They went down the footpath to the common. "Here we are," said Dad chirpily. "Let's sit down here, shall we?" He got out a flask of hot chocolate and some snacks for them to share. They sat and ate in silence. Then, just as the sun brightened the

edges of the night sky, a bird started to sing in the trees. "It's a robin!" said Dawn, in delight. This time, in the quiet of the common, she heard another bird joining in, too. Dawn listened, enchanted by the sound. "That's a nightingale," said Dad. Next to the song of the nightingale, the robin's song seemed a bit plain. But now other birds were singing as well. The songs were all different. Some cawed, some tweeted, and some whistled, some were quiet and some were loud.

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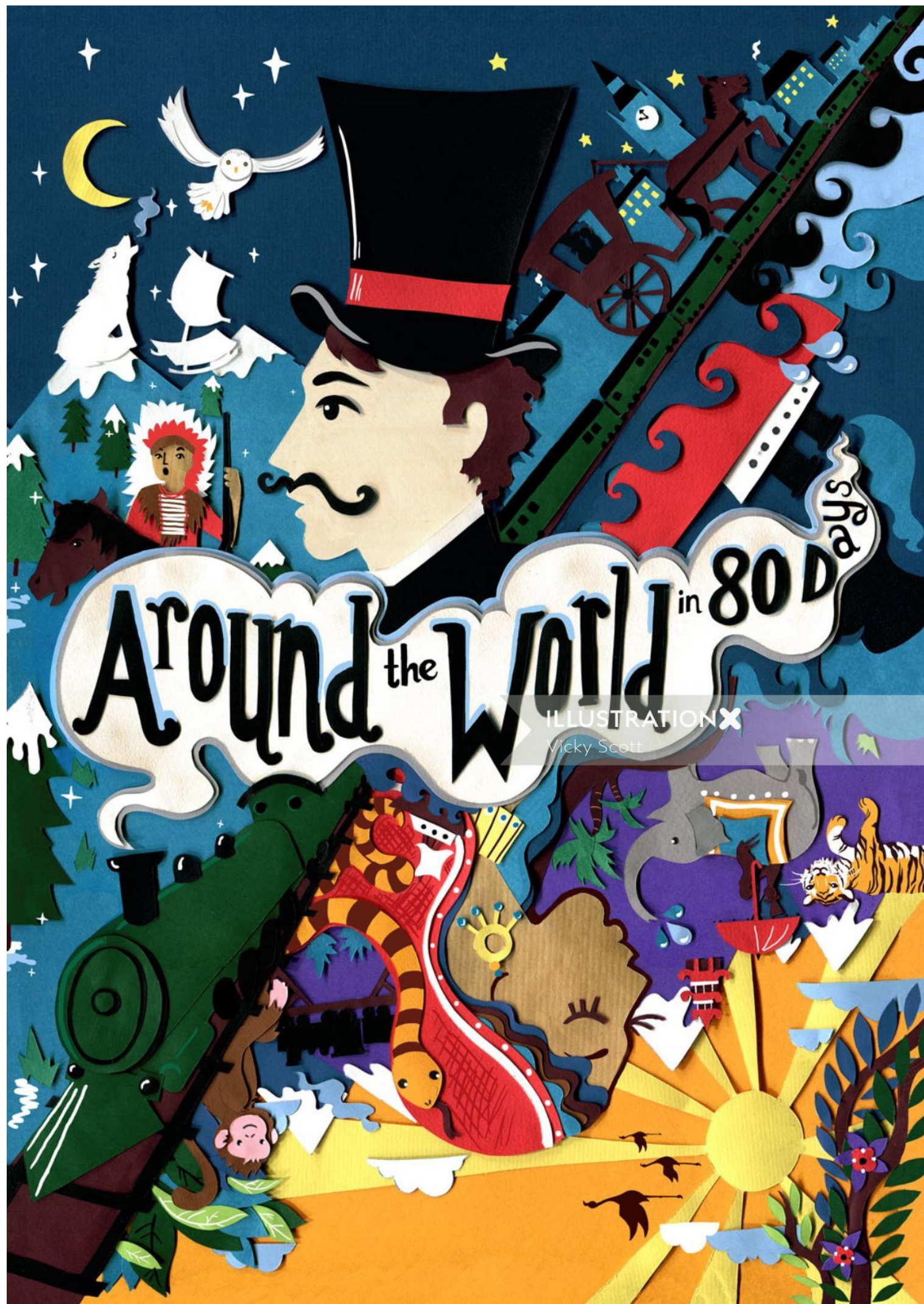
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INTIMATE HEALTH

Finally, there may be good news about endometriosis

A new blood test could detect endometriosis in 90 per cent of women who have it. But can it change the problems around how we treat this debilitating illness?

WORDS BY ROSALIND RYAN | ILLUSTRATIONS VICKY SCOTT

WHAT IS ENDOMETRIOSIS?
It's a condition where the cells lining the womb get into the wrong places, such as the ovaries and fallopian tubes,' says Dr Jan Toledano of the London Hormone Clinic (londonhormoneclinic.com). 'When the womb lining grows and breaks down, those stray cells do as well, causing severe pelvic pain. This pain can be bad enough to interfere with your everyday life, leaving you stuck in bed, unable to work or even see your friends and family. Other symptoms include: heavy, painful periods; pain during or after sex; pain while having a poo; constipation; feeling sick or unusually tired; anxiety; and, sometimes, trouble conceiving. Peter Barton-Smith, consultant gynaecological surgeon for the Princess Grace Hospital, London (endometriosisclinic.co.uk), says, 'Your pain will also generally have a cyclical nature, so it tends to be worse during your period.' Some women don't actually have any symptoms at all – and their endometriosis is only discovered during an operation for another unrelated condition, such as the removal of an appendix.

WHAT CAUSES THE CONDITION?
The exact cause of endometriosis is not known, but there are several different theories:
RETROGRADE MENSTRUATION This is where some of the womb lining flows back up through the Fallopian tubes and attaches to the organs in your pelvis.
YOUR GENES Endometriosis tends to run in families, and some families from certain ethnic groups may be more susceptible.
IMMUNE SYSTEM DISORDER Your body fails to target and destroy endometrial cells outside the womb, and you may have reduced immunity to other illnesses.
LYMPHATIC SPREAD Endometrial cells could travel around the body in the lymphatic system or bloodstream.
TOXINS IN THE ENVIRONMENT A new theory proposes that exposure to certain environmental chemicals, particularly dioxins, can trigger endometriosis, but no research has found that this happens in humans.
Certain risk factors also make developing endometriosis more likely, including starting your periods early, short menstrual cycles and high oestrogen levels. 'Stress is very important, too,' says Dr Toledano. 'When you're stressed, many hormonal changes happen in the body including raised oestrogen levels.' Your diet can also increase your chances of developing endometriosis. 'Sugars can be a risk, while caffeine and alcohol may be triggers for some women,' warns Dr Toledano. However, a 2015 review by Universidade Federal de São Paulo, Brazil, found a diet rich in omega-3 fatty acids, vitamin D, fresh fruits and vegetables – preferably organic – and wholegrains could help prevent endometriosis developing or getting worse.

THE DIAGNOSIS DEBACLE
Despite raised awareness, partly thanks to celebrities like Lena Dunham, it takes seven and eight years to get diagnosed. Why? 'It's a disease that misleads,' says Barton-Smith. 'I still see women who have been told by their GP to put up with painful periods because periods are painful! But others may feel they're over-complaining or don't have the confidence to keep pushing for a diagnosis.' This comes on women to keep pushing is a major part of the problem. Dr Caroline Overton, spokesperson for the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, says, 'Endometriosis starts when your periods begin, but if you have nothing to compare it with, you might think painful periods are normal.' Endometriosis also runs in families but if your mother wasn't diagnosed, she may have unwittingly passed on the message that this is what periods are like. FYI – very painful, heavy periods are not normal, so see your doctor. A lack of understanding and awareness among healthcare professionals may also be to blame, but that's not surprising. Most have between five and 10 minutes for each patient, and they're not endometriosis experts. Many of the symptoms could also be other conditions, such as irritable bowel syndrome (IBS). Keep a symptom diary, noting how many painkillers you take and the impact on your everyday life, and take it to your appointment – download one from the Endometriosis UK website (endometriosis-uk.org). You can also ask to be referred to a gynaecologist, or swap to a different GP.

HOW IT'S TREATED
Treatment for endometriosis depends on your age, whether you want to get pregnant, your pain levels and the severity of the condition. There's no cure, but it's usually confirmed

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How to build your slimming dream team

Even with the best of intentions, friends and family can knock your weight loss plans off course. Here's how to turn those well-meaning saboteurs into your biggest cheerleaders!

Words: **Christabel Smith**
Illustration: **Vicky Scott**



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18 SLIMMING WORLD MAGAZINE

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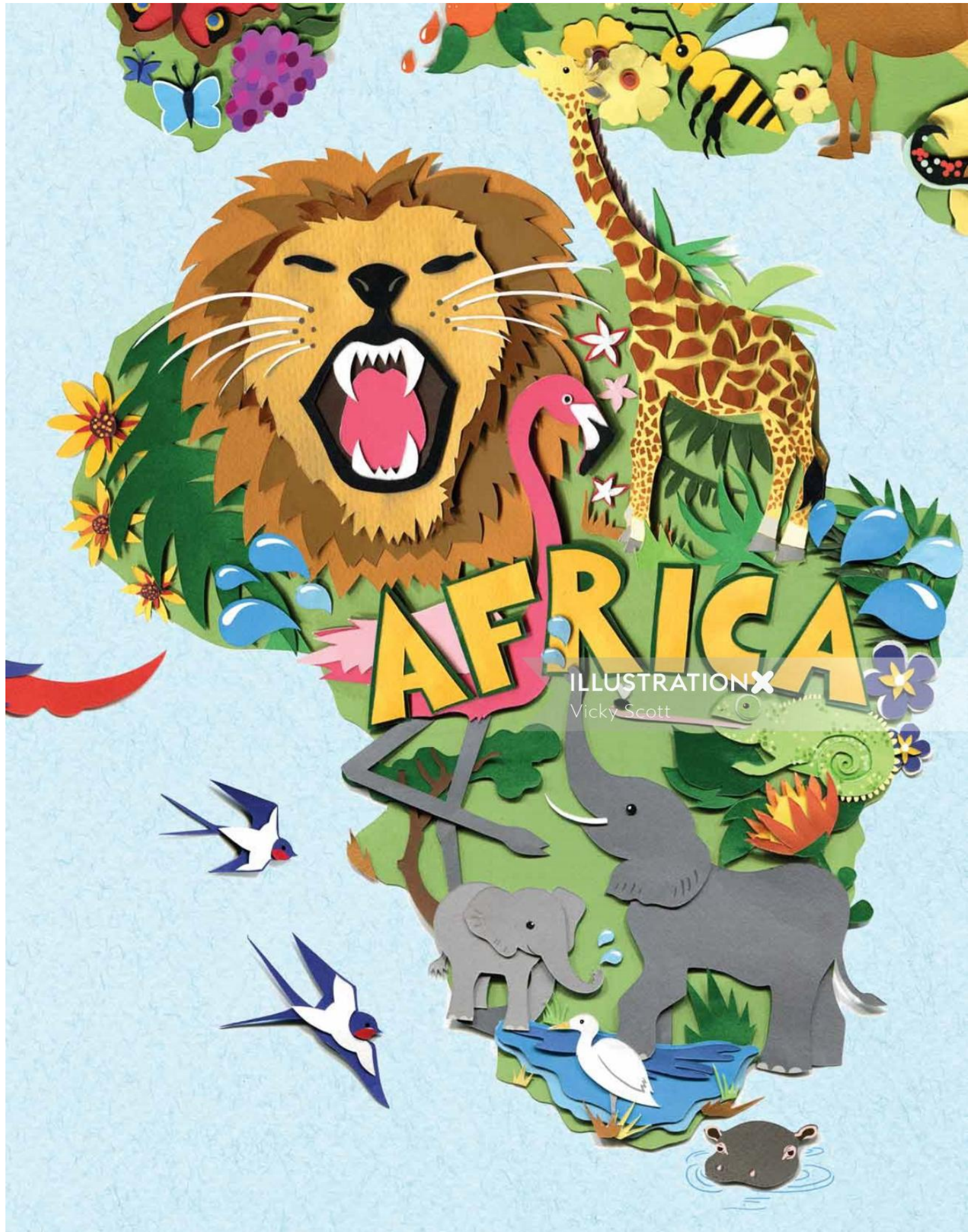
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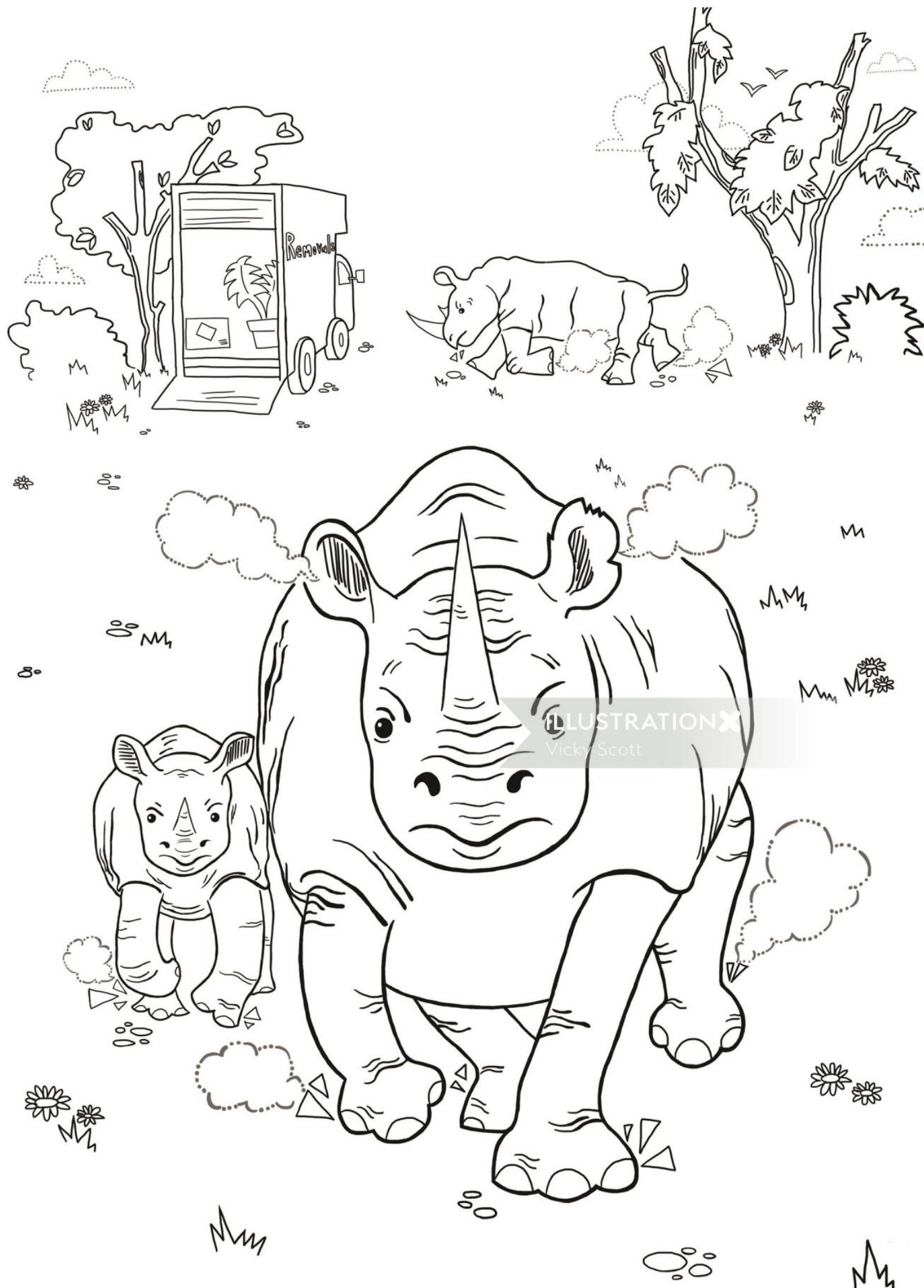
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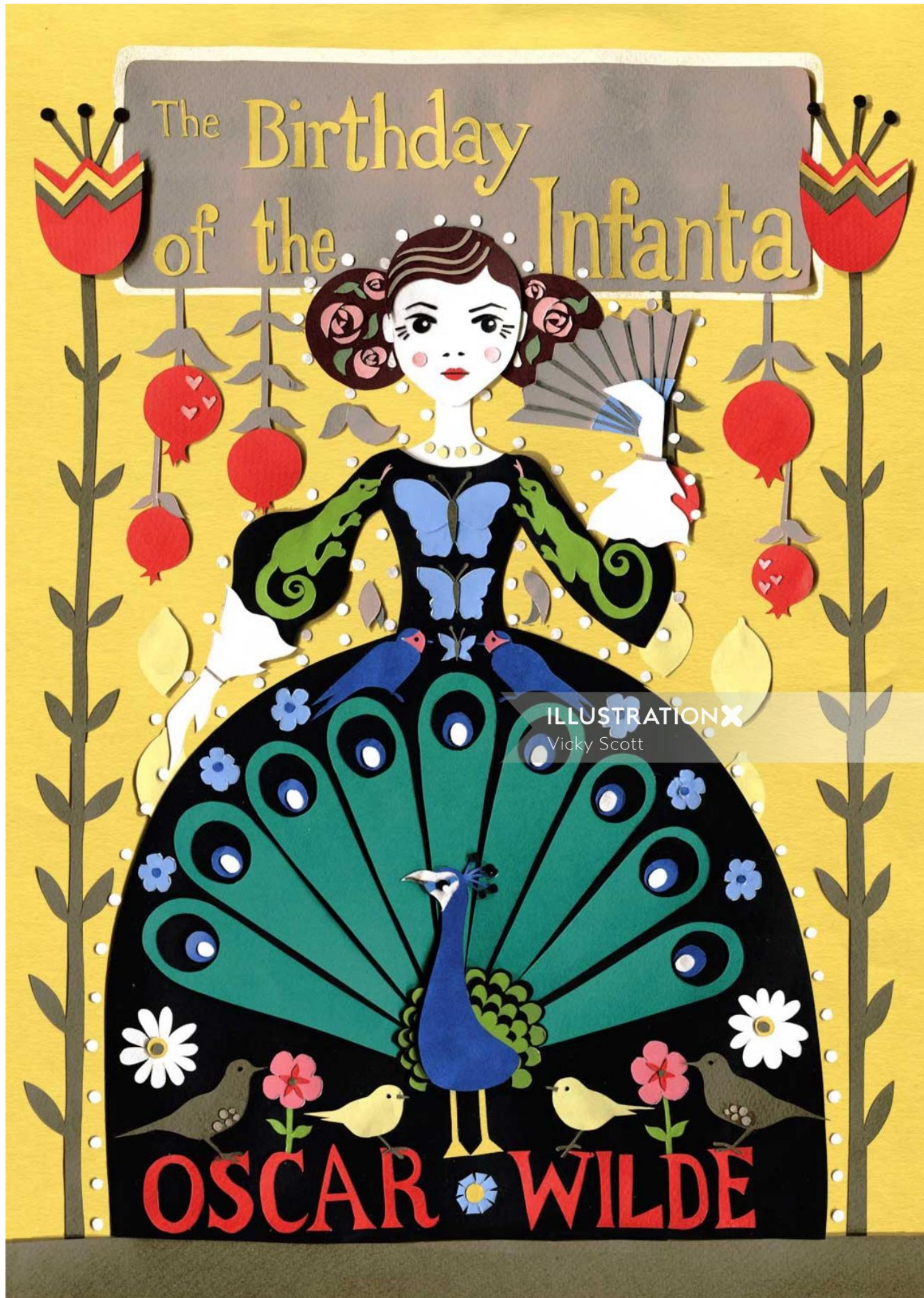
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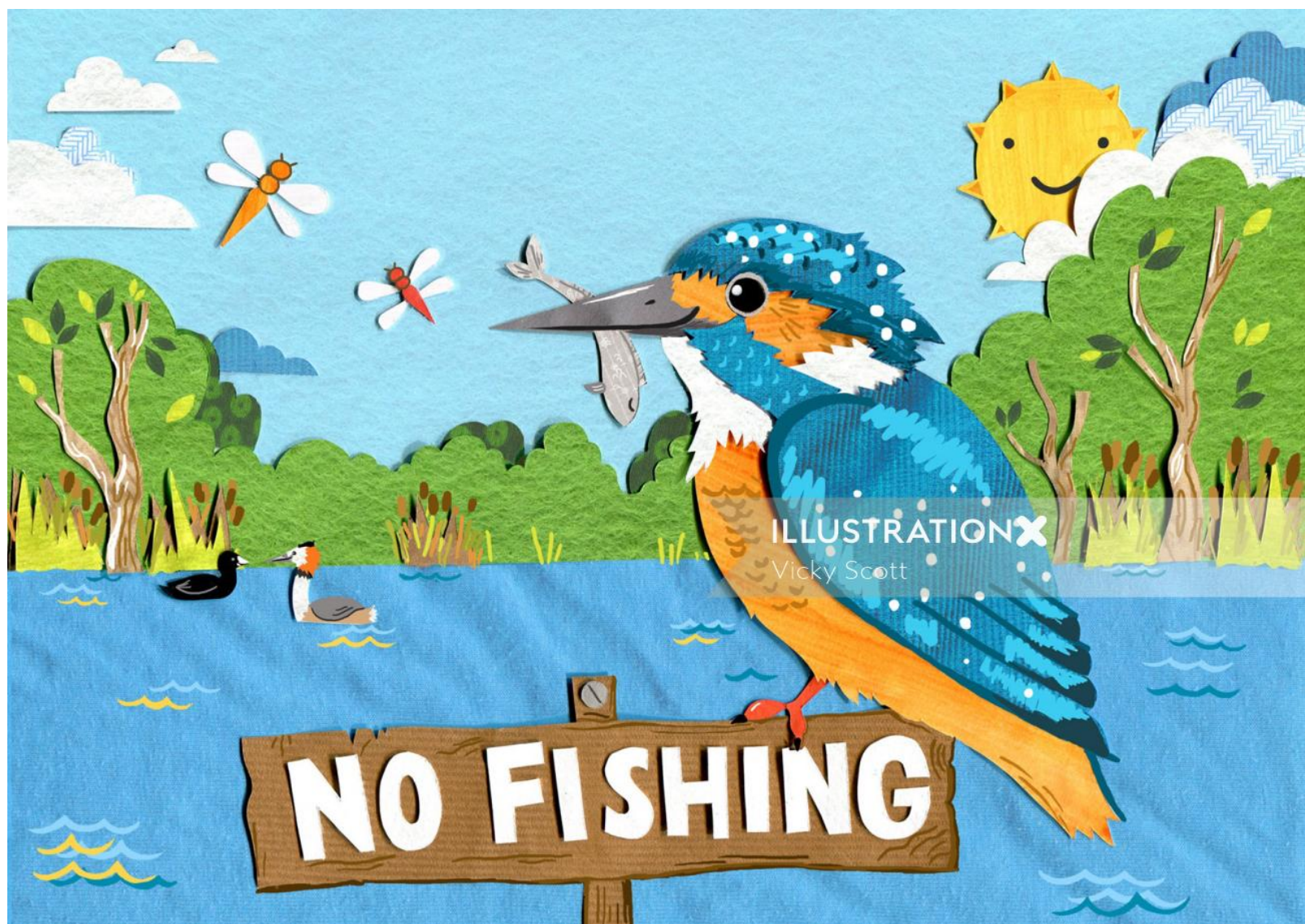
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